

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARM BILL SIGNUP UNDERWAY—ELIGIBLE TENNESSEE LANDOWNERS QUALIFY FOR 50-90% COSTSHARE FUNDS

Tennessee landowners who want to improve their land may qualify for cost-share assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS has begun sign-up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Eligible applicants can receive 50-percent cost-share funds to help convert their croplands to grasslands; reduce erosion; improve an existing irrigation system; contain waste from animal feeding operations; improve forest habitat; improve water habitat for aquatic at-risk species; or even get rid of invasive plant species such as privet or kudzu. Eligible Limited Resource Farmers may qualify for up to 90-percent in cost-share funds. Program sign-up continues until November 1, 2007.

Agricultural producers interested in hay production, livestock grazing, and wildlife habitats have an additional incentive to establish native grasses for hay, pasture, or field buffers. An EQIP funding pool appropriately named "Grassland At-Risk Species Habitat Conservation" specifically promotes the establishment and management of native grasses for forage production and wildlife habitat. Producers are eligible for cost-share to establish native grasses as well as additional incentive payments of \$75/acre/year for the first two years they manage the newly planted stand. In addition, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) is providing a \$55 per acre (one-time) incentive payment for installing and managing native grasses under this specific statewide funding pool.

"Native Warm Season Grasses provide excellent hay and forage and, when properly managed, can provide great wildlife habitat, especially for ground nesting birds like quail," said Tennessee's State Conservationist Kevin Brown. "Producers like these grasses because the majority of their growth occurs in the summer when you have optimum hay drying conditions and when forages such as fescue and orchard grass produce very little hay."

Native grasses are extremely drought tolerant, and can withstand long periods of dry weather. The last few summers in Tennessee have shown how well native grasses can perform when cool season forages have suffered. Yields of 3-6 tons per acre of native grasses are common after the second year.

To find out more, contact your local NRCS office or the county Soil Conservation District and ask about the EQIP program or go to <http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov>. To learn more about the TWRA, go to <http://www.state.tn.us/twra/>.

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Helping People Help the Land